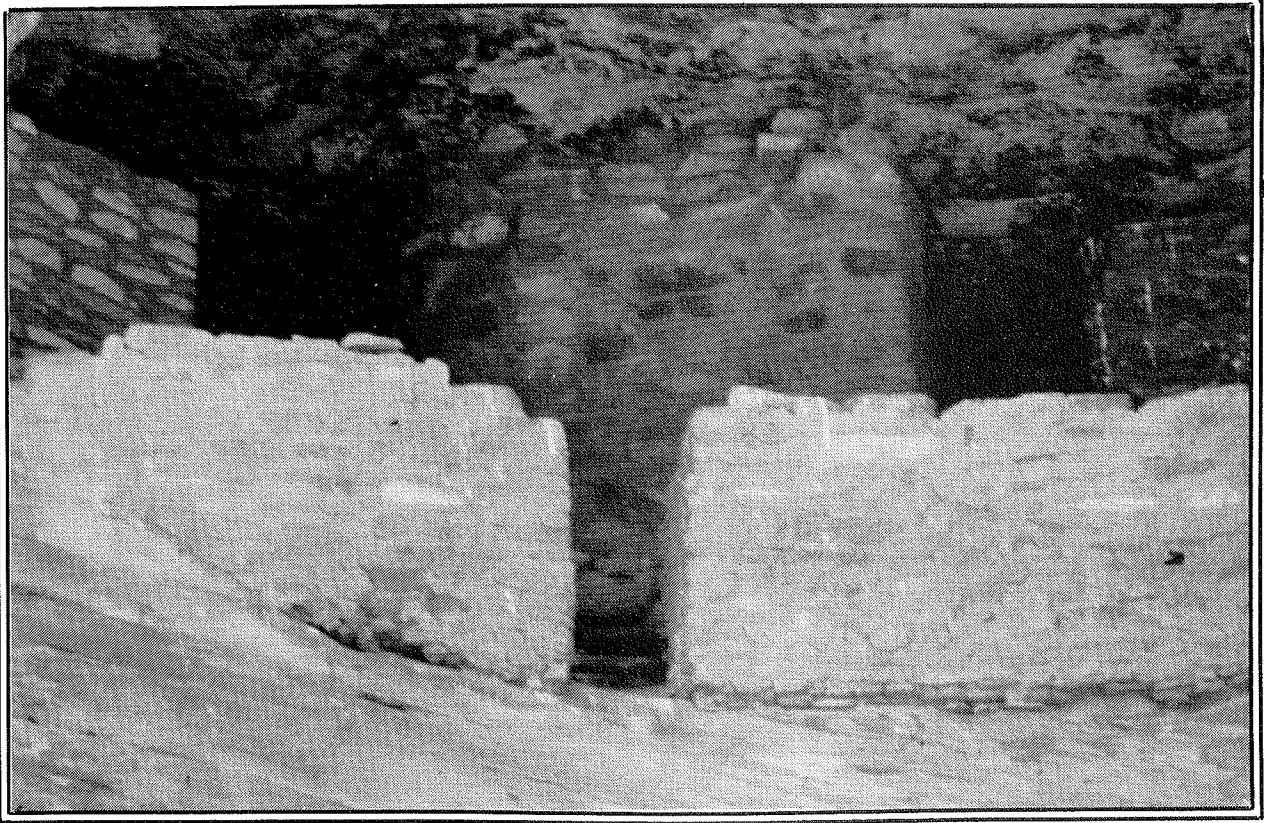


Mule Canyon WSA



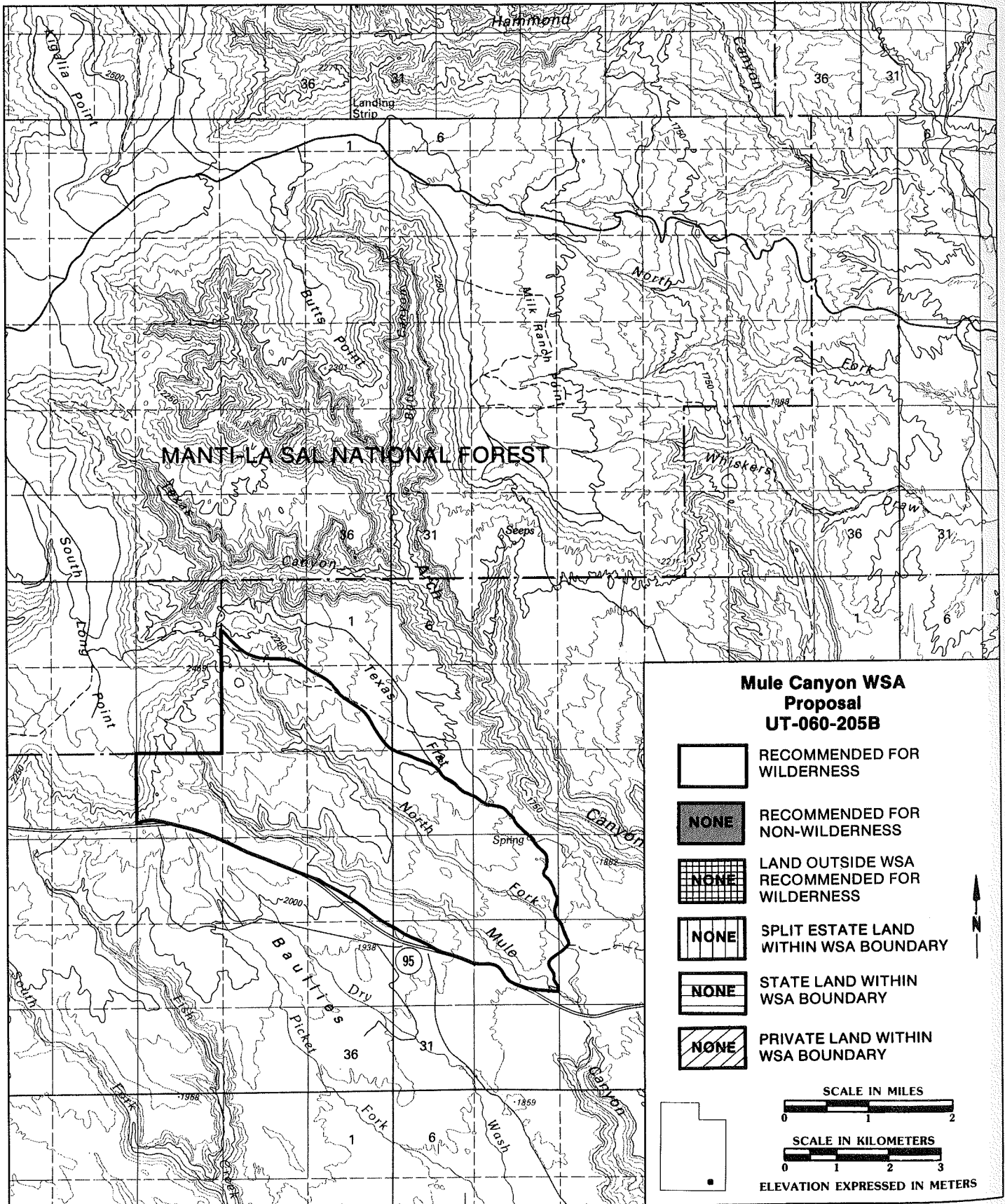
MULE CANYON WSA

R. 19 E.







R. 20 E.

T. 36 S.

T. 37 S.



Mule Canyon WSA Proposal UT-060-205B

-  RECOMMENDED FOR WILDERNESS
-  NONE RECOMMENDED FOR NON-WILDERNESS
-  NONE LAND OUTSIDE WSA RECOMMENDED FOR WILDERNESS
-  NONE SPLIT ESTATE LAND WITHIN WSA BOUNDARY
-  NONE STATE LAND WITHIN WSA BOUNDARY
-  NONE PRIVATE LAND WITHIN WSA BOUNDARY

SCALE IN MILES



SCALE IN KILOMETERS



ELEVATION EXPRESSED IN METERS

October 1991

MULE CANYON WILDERNESS STUDY AREA

1. THE STUDY AREA: 5,990 acres

The Mule Canyon Wilderness Study Area (WSA) (UT-060-205B) is in south-central San Juan County, about 30 miles west of Blanding, Utah (population 3,118). The study area is oriented northwest-southeast, and extends approximately 5 miles from the northwest to the southeast and 2.25 miles from east to west. A rangeland project and a dirt road form the north and west boundaries. The WSA is bounded by State Highway 95 on the south and by the Manti-La Sal National Forest on the west (see Map). The WSA contains 5,990 acres of public land administered by the Bureau of Land Management (BLM). No State, private, or split-estate lands are within the WSA (see Table 1).

The WSA is in the Canyonlands Section of the Colorado Plateau Physiographic Province.

The two canyons which characterize the study area, the head of Mule Canyon and the head of the North Fork of Mule Canyon, trend southeast. The walls of the canyons are alternating layers of red and white sandstone. The canyons cut into a terrace which is part of Grand Gulch Plateau, or Cedar Mesa. No perennial streams flow in the WSA. Elevations in the WSA range from 6,000 feet in the southeastern part of the WSA to 7,600 feet in the northwest. About 40 percent of the study area is barren of vegetation, but a fairly dense, mature pinyon-juniper woodland and scattered Ponderosa Pine and Douglas-fir trees cover most of the WSA. The climate is semiarid, with warm summers and cool winters.

The WSA was studied under Section 603 of the Federal Land Policy and Management Act (FLPMA) and was included in the Utah BLM Statewide Wilderness Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) finalized in November 1990.

TABLE 1
LAND STATUS AND ACREAGE SUMMARY IN THE STUDY AREA

WITHIN THE WSA	ACRES
BLM (surface and subsurface)	5,990
Split-Estate (BLM surface only)	0
In-holdings (State, Private)	0
Total	5,990
WITHIN THE RECOMMENDED WILDERNESS BOUNDARY	
BLM (within the WSA)	5,990
BLM (outside the WSA)	0
Split-Estate (within the WSA)	0
Split-Estate (outside the WSA)	0
Total BLM land recommended for wilderness	5,990
In-holdings (State, private)	0
WITHIN THE AREA NOT RECOMMENDED FOR WILDERNESS	
BLM	0
Split-Estate	0
Total BLM land not recommended for wilderness	0
In-holdings (State, Private)	0

Source: BLM File Data

MULE CANYON WILDERNESS STUDY AREA

Two alternatives were analyzed in the EIS: an all wilderness alternative, which is the recommendation in this report, and a no wilderness (no action) alternative.

Subsequent to publication of the Utah BLM Statewide Wilderness Final EIS, the Utah State Director approved the San Juan Resource Area Resource Management Plan (RMP). The plan includes all of the Mule Canyon WSA in the Cedar Mesa Area of Critical Environmental Concern (ACEC) to protect cultural resources, scenic values, and natural values associated with primitive recreation. Approximately 20 percent (1,200 acres) of the Mule Canyon WSA was included in a Scenic Highway Corridor ACEC to protect scenic quality. Management prescriptions for a Scenic Highway Corridor ACEC take precedence over those for the Cedar Mesa ACEC where the ACECs overlap.

For the approximately 20 percent of the WSA in the Scenic Highway Corridor ACEC, the special management requirements now in effect, where consistent with valid existing rights, include: stipulations to prevent surface occupancy on oil and gas leases (Category 3); requirements for an approved plan of operations with special conditions to limit surface use for mining related activity; disposal of mineral materials subject to visual quality considerations; private and commercial use of woodland products in designated areas only, except on-site collection of dead wood for campfires; limitation of off-highway vehicle (OHV) use to existing roads and trails; management to limit recreation use if scenic values are being damaged; management to meet Visual Resource Management (VRM) Class I objectives.

For the approximately 80 percent of the WSA in the Cedar Mesa ACEC, the special management requirements now in effect, where consistent with valid existing rights, include: mineral leasing, geophysical work and disposal of mineral materials with special conditions to protect cultural and scenic resources and primitive recreation opportunities (Category 2), limitation of OHV use to designated roads and trails, private and commercial use of woodland products only in designated areas only, except that

on-site collection of dead wood for campfires would be allowed.

2. RECOMMENDATION AND RATIONALE:

- 5,990 acres
(recommended for wilderness)
- 0 acres
(not recommended for wilderness)

The recommendation for this WSA is to designate the entire area (5,990 acres) as wilderness. This is the environmentally preferable alternative as it would result in the least change from the natural environment over the long term.

All of the WSA is in a natural condition and has outstanding opportunities for primitive recreation. About 87 percent of the WSA has outstanding opportunities for solitude. The remaining 13 percent of the WSA does not have outstanding opportunities for solitude due to the nearness of State Highway 95. Archaeological sites are significant in the WSA; most of the 37 known archaeological sites in the study area are cliff dwellings.

The entire WSA is in the Cedar Mesa ACEC where restrictions on OHV use, mineral and energy exploration and development, and harvest of woodland products would continue to be administratively applied if the area is released from wilderness consideration and protection of wilderness characteristics is not a management objective. Approximately 20 percent of the WSA is in a Scenic Highway Corridor ACEC where restrictions on OHV use, mineral and energy exploration, visual impacts, and woodland harvest would continue to be administratively applied if protection of wilderness characteristics is not a management objective.

No conflicts exist with mineral-related or other land uses.

3. CRITERIA CONSIDERED IN DEVELOPING THE WILDERNESS RECOMMENDATION

Wilderness Characteristics

A. Naturalness

Naturalness is defined as an attribute in which the evidence of man is substantially unnoticeable to the average visitor and where minor imprints of man

MULE CANYON WILDERNESS STUDY AREA

exhibit no cumulative impact that is substantially noticeable. Most of the WSA appears to be predominantly natural and free of human imprints. The isolation of the canyons, the outstanding cultural values and the scenic qualities of the WSA contribute to its naturalness. Imprints on Texas Flat (a road, railing, and reservoir) were excluded from the WSA in the BLM Intensive Wilderness Inventory. The remaining imprints are all on the periphery and are so minor that they do not affect the naturalness of the WSA as a whole. Imprints of human occupancy and activity cover less than 1 percent of the WSA. No surface-disturbing activities have taken place in the WSA since the BLM Wilderness Inventory in 1980.

Dog Tank Spring was improved in 1971 by the installation of 700 feet of buried pipe, directing water into two metal troughs. A campsite is near this spring which consists of a short spur way from the boundary road, a small clearing, and a fire ring.

In the extreme southeast of the unit, adjacent to old State Highway 95, is a pole-fence livestock corral.

Adjacent to State Highway 95 is the Mule Canyon Ruins Rest Stop. This interpretive rest stop is just outside the WSA's boundary.

From the boundary road in Section 20 a way through the pinyon-juniper is about 0.3 mile long. Also, in a few places, vehicle tracks extend into the unit for short distances from State Highway 95.

B. Solitude

Approximately 87 percent (5,190 acres) of the WSA has outstanding opportunities for solitude. The north and south forks of Mule Canyon provide outstanding opportunities for solitude because of terrain and vegetation. The two forks are each about 5 miles long. They cut 500 feet deep into the mesa on the west but are only 80 feet deep where they leave the WSA. Pinyon, juniper, cottonwoods, ponderosa pine, and Douglas fir trees combine with the terrain to enhance seclusion within the WSA.

The two canyons of the WSA are the main recreational routes. They provide a limited number of travel choices because there are no major side drainages. With increased use the opportunities for solitude would be reduced as a single party could hike both canyons in a day's time. About 13 percent (800 acres) of the WSA do not meet the criterion for outstanding opportunities for solitude.

Sights and sounds from the adjacent State Highway 95 limit opportunities for solitude in the WSA up to the rim of the South Fork of Mule Canyon. Farther north in the WSA, beyond the rim of the canyon, the pinyon-juniper woodlands and the deep canyons screen highway sights and sounds.

C. Primitive and Unconfined Recreation

All 5,990 acres within the WSA offer outstanding opportunities for primitive and unconfined recreation. The deep, narrow, winding canyons provide opportunities for hiking and exploration.

Hiking in Mule Canyon is varied in the level of difficulty. In the middle and lower sections of the canyons, gravel wash bottoms and cattle trails facilitate hiking. The upper ends of the canyons are more challenging, as the canyons become steeper and boulders and ponderosa pine trees choke the narrow canyon bottoms.

The easy access to this WSA from State Highway 95 on the south and Texas Flat road on the east enhances the opportunity for primitive recreation but could also detract from the recreation experience by facilitating increased numbers of visits.

The WSA includes two 5-mile segments of canyons that tend to channel users, limiting the unconfined nature of hiking to up-and-down the canyons.

Other opportunities for primitive and unconfined recreation include backpacking; rock climbing and scrambling; hunting, exploration, nature study, and observing features of geologic and archaeological interest.

MULE CANYON WILDERNESS STUDY AREA

D. Special Features

Archaeological values are high and are of special interest to visitors of the WSA. There are 37 known Anasazi sites within the WSA, most of which are cliff dwellings. These picturesque ancient structures add elements of discovery and education to the primitive recreation experience.

The WSA also contains special geological features such as arches and natural bridges. Additionally, 53 percent of this WSA has outstanding scenery characterized by smooth red sandstone and the contrasting greens of Ponderosa pine and Douglas fir. The scenery adds to the enjoyment of hiking in this naturally beautiful area.

Cougars, which are often associated with wilderness, frequent the WSA. Peregrine falcons and bald eagles, which are listed as endangered species, may occasionally visit the WSA. Seven other animal species and two plant species that are considered sensitive may occur in the WSA.

Refer to Appendix 4 and the Affected Environment, Vegetation and Wildlife Including Special Status Species sections of the Utah BLM Statewide Wilderness Final EIS for additional information.

Diversity in the National Wilderness Preservation System (NWPS)

A. Expanding the Diversity of Natural Systems and Features as Represented by Ecosystems

Wilderness designation of this WSA would not add a combination of potential natural vegetation (PNV) ecosystems not presently represented in the NWPS.

PNV is the vegetative type that would eventually become climax vegetation if not altered by human interference, and is not necessarily the vegetation that is currently present in an area.

The WSA is in the Colorado Plateau Province/Ecoregion. The PNV in the WSA is juniper-pinyon woodland (4,500 acres) and pine-Douglas fir forest (1,490 acres). Both PNV types are represented in the NWPS nationally and in Utah and in other BLM study areas both in and outside of Utah. This information is summarized in Table 2, from data compiled in December 1989.

B. Assessing the Opportunities for Solitude or Primitive Recreation within a Days Driving Time (5 Hours) of Major Population Centers

The WSA is not within a 5-hour drive of any major population centers.

**TABLE 2
ECOSYSTEM REPRESENTATION**

BAILEY-KUCHLER CLASSIFICATION (PNV)	NWPS AREAS		OTHER BLM STUDIES	
	AREAS	ACRES	AREAS	ACRES
NATIONWIDE (COLORADO PLATEAU PROVINCE)				
Juniper-Pinyon Woodland	11	1,401,745	84	2,139,505
Pine-Douglas Fir Forest	6	125,523	7	17,442
UTAH (COLORADO PLATEAU PROVINCE)				
Juniper-Pinyon Woodland	1	26,000	54	1,701,698
Pine-Douglas Fir Forest	1	45,000	1	3,750

Source: BLM File Data.

MULE CANYON WILDERNESS STUDY AREA

C. Balancing the Geographic Distribution of Wilderness Areas

The Mule Canyon WSA would not contribute significantly to balancing the geographic distribution of wilderness areas within the NWPS.

As of January 1987, the NWPS included 93 areas comprising 5,475,207 acres in Utah and in Arizona and Colorado, the adjacent states nearest the WSA. A Mule Canyon Wilderness would supplement the NWPS in the Canyonlands Section of the Colorado Plateau, however, where there are just two established wilderness areas, totaling 70,751 acres. There are four designated wilderness areas within 100 miles of the WSA. To the north is the 45,000-acre Dark Canyon Wilderness (U.S. Forest Service [FS]), to the east is the 8,100-acre Mesa Verde Wilderness (National Park Service [NPS]). To the southwest is the 112,400-acre Paria Canyon-Vermilion Cliffs Wilderness (BLM) and to the northwest is the 25,751-acre Box-Death Hollow Wilderness (FS).

Manageability (The area must be capable of being effectively managed to preserve its wilderness character.)

The WSA could be managed as wilderness. There are no State or private lands in the WSA. No surface-disturbing activities are projected for the area following wilderness designation. There are no oil and gas leases in the WSA. There is one pending oil and gas lease covering 200 acres in the WSA. There are no mining claims, as well as little or no potential for locatable minerals. Domestic livestock grazing would continue as presently authorized.

Approximately 11 miles of roads which form a portion of the WSA boundary would remain open to vehicular use. Despite traffic along these roads, outstanding opportunities for solitude exist in 87 percent of the WSA. Unauthorized ORV use poses an administrative problem along the southern boundary of the WSA due to the lack of fences and flat terrain along portions of the State Highway 95 right-of-way.

Energy and Mineral Resource Values

The U.S. Geological Survey (USGS) and U.S. Bureau of Mines (USBM) prepared a mineral assessment report for the Mule Canyon WSA (USGS Bulletin 1755-B, Dana J. Bove, et al., 1989). The report indicated that no mineral resources were identified during field examination in the WSA except for common-variety sand and gravel and there is no history of mineral production.

The potential for undiscovered oil and gas is moderate. The potential for undiscovered coal, geothermal resources, and metals, including uranium and thorium, is low. Sandstone and sand and gravel have no unique qualities, but could have limited local use for road surfaces or other construction purposes. Similar materials are abundant outside the study area, however.

Impacts on Resources

The comparative impact table (Table 3) summarizes the effects on pertinent resources for alternatives considered including designation or nondesignation of the area as wilderness.

Local Social and Economic Considerations

Social and economic factors were not considered to be significant issues in the EIS.

Summary of WSA-Specific Comments

Public involvement has occurred throughout the wilderness review process. Comments received during the early stages of the EIS preparation were used to develop significant study issues and alternatives for the ultimate management of the WSA.

During formal public review of the Draft EIS, a total of 221 inputs specifically addressing this WSA were received from 1,019 commenters, including oral statements received at 17 public hearings on the EIS. Each letter or oral testimony was considered to be one input. Duplicate letters or oral statements by the

MULE CANYON WILDERNESS STUDY AREA

same commenter were not counted as additional inputs or signatures. Each individual was credited with one signature or testimony regardless of the number of inputs. In general, 202 commenters supported wilderness designation for part or all of the WSA, while 812 commenters were opposed. Five commenters addressed the relative merits of the EIS but took no formal position on wilderness designation.

Those favoring wilderness commented on the primitive recreation opportunities in the WSA, special features, and general wilderness qualities. They noted that wilderness designation would protect the area from development. The majority of those commenting were from other states.

Those opposing wilderness were concerned that wilderness would harm local and State economies and that wilderness designation is unnecessary as there is already enough wilderness and the area can be adequately protected by other means of management. Most of those opposing wilderness designation were from rural Utah.

One Federal agency, the USBM, commented on the Draft EIS for this WSA. USBM did not take a position regarding designation of the WSA but commented that BLM underrated the petroleum potential of the WSA.

No comment letters were received on the Final EIS.

There are no State sections or private lands in the WSA. In commenting on the Draft EIS, the State of Utah expressed general opposition to wilderness designation but did not take a definite position regarding wilderness designation of the WSA. The State commented that the Mule Canyon WSA has moderate to high wilderness values and low conflicts; however, the State commented that an administrative designation to facilitate special management of outstanding cultural values is preferable to a wilderness designation. In addition, the State commented that the reports on the oil and gas potential of the WSA were conflicting, and further study was recommended.

The Mule Canyon WSA is in San Juan County. The San Juan County Master Plan emphasizes multiple use of public lands and zones the WSA as open range and forest land. The San Juan County Commission is opposed to wilderness designation for the Mule Canyon WSA and has endorsed the Consolidated Local Government Response to Wilderness that opposes wilderness designation of BLM lands in Utah. In commenting on the Draft EIS the Commission noted that designation of the WSA as wilderness would be in conflict with the County Master Plan. The Commission noted that the area is bounded by roads and is too small to be anything but marginal wilderness. The Commission believes that BLM has underestimated the mineral potential of the WSA. The Commission also pointed out that State holdings would conflict with wilderness management and that the WSA is geologically and ecologically identical to other areas already protected in the Glen Canyon National Recreation Area, National Parks, National Monuments and FS wilderness within the Colorado Plateau and in San Juan County.

MULE CANYON WSA

Table 3
Comparative Summary of Impacts by Alternative^a

Alternatives	
Issue Topic	No Action/No Wilderness
Recommendation All Wilderness (5,990 Acres)	
Impacts on Wilderness Values	Wilderness values would not be protected by wilderness designation. In the foreseeable future, naturalness and opportunities for solitude and primitive recreation would be directly lost on 20 acres and indirectly reduced in quality on up to 590 acres. Special features would not be significantly affected. Vehicular use including use of 0.3 mile of existing way and future mineral exploration roads, would detract from opportunities for solitude and primitive recreation.
Impacts on Mineral and Energy Exploration and Production	Implementation of the No Action/No Wilderness Alternative would not adversely affect mineral exploration or production because minerals could be leased, claimed, and developed as at present. Approximately 80 percent of the WSA would be open to mineral exploration and development with special conditions to protect cultural and scenic resources and primitive recreation opportunities (Category 2). Approximately 20 percent of the WSA would be open to mineral leasing with stipulations to prevent surface occupancy (Category 3), and open for mineral entry with an approved plan of operations.

MULE CANYON WSA

Table 3 (Continued)
Comparative Summary of Impacts by Alternative

Alternatives		
Issue Topic	Recommendation All Wilderness (5,990 Acres)	No Action/No Wilderness
Impacts on Cultural Resources	Cultural resources including 37 recorded sites would receive additional protection. The benefits of protection from most surface disturbance and all vehicular access would probably outweigh any negative effects from increased vandalism due to increased future recreational use. Management may be restricted in scope and execution in order to protect other wilderness values.	Little impact to cultural resources due to surface development is expected with this alternative. Measures that limit surface disturbance would reduce direct and indirect impacts on cultural resources. Cultural properties eligible for the National Register of Historic Places would be surrounded by an avoidance area sufficient to allow permanent protection. Vehicle access may be limited under the San Juan RMP to assist in decreasing illegal artifact collection and excavation in the northwestern part of the WSA. Cultural resources would be managed for information potential, public values, and conservation. Cultural resource management would continue without regard to wilderness management.

^a The BLM San Juan RMP was approved following publication of the BLM Utah Statewide Wilderness EIS. The analysis of impacts summarized here has been modified to reflect the more restrictive management practices established by the RMP.